



What is Pride Month?

Fast facts

Thousands of people now turn out for Spokane's Pride Month celebration, but how did it begin? Why is it in June? How does the history of LGBT people in Spokane compare to elsewhere in the nation?

How did Pride Month come about?

Riots broke out at **Stonewall Inn**, a bar in New York City, in June of 1969.

The bar had been frequently raided by police. Solicitation of same-sex relations was [illegal in New York City](#) (NYC) throughout the 1960s, so patrons were often arrested and sexually harassed during raids, and bars without influential owners were shut down.

The mafia owned and operated Stonewall Inn and many other same-sex gathering places in NYC because they could avoid paying for a liquor license by claiming to be a "bottle club," which is where patrons bring their own alcohol, and ignore health and safety codes and also get tipoffs about raids in advance in order to hide the alcohol they were selling.

Stonewall Inn was one of the few gay bars in NYC at the time that welcomed drag queens, allowed dancing, and was a safe haven for runaway teens. This time, the raid was unexpected, conducted by plainclothes police officers, and was on the heels of beloved gay icon [Judy Garland's death](#), and citizens fought back against arrests. One of the police officers shoved [Stormé DeLarverie](#), who retaliated by punching the officer in the face. Four police officers wrestled her to the ground and began beating her with batons, inciting the beginning of the riot.

[Marsha P. Johnson](#), an advocate for homeless transgender youth, yelled, "I got my civil rights!" and threw a shot glass, later referred to as the shot glass heard around the world. Co-founder of the **Gay Liberation Front** [Sylvia Rivera](#) claims to have thrown the second Molotov cocktail. [Miss Major Griffin-Gracy](#) took part in the riots and was knocked unconscious with a broken jaw before being arrested, later mentoring formerly incarcerated transgender women. Passers-by on **Christopher Street** joined in, and the police became outnumbered and barricaded themselves inside the bar.

The riots lasted six days and involved thousands of participants. As a resolution to the riots, the first Pride Parade was held in November of the same year, organized by police lieutenant [Fred Sargent](#), bookstore owner [Craig Rodwell](#), and "lavender menace" activists [Linda Rhodes and Ellen Broity](#).

The [Stonewall riots](#) are considered a turning point for the gay rights movement, as **LGBT** (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) citizens realized they could fight back against second-class treatment.

The next year, a **Pride Parade** was held in New York City, [San Francisco](#), and Chicago in memory of the riots and to advocate for LGBT rights. [Pride parades](#) spread to cities across the nation. Around this time, the term "Gay [Pride](#)" began appearing for the first time in print.

Within two years, the [number of gay and lesbian groups](#) in the U.S. had grown from fewer than 20 to approximately 1,200.



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Fast facts

In 1999, President Bill Clinton released [Proclamation 7203](#), declaring June “Gay and Lesbian Pride Month”, the first official marking of Pride from the White House.

President Barak Obama released an official proclamation of June as “LGBT Pride Month” each year of his presidency and declared the [Stonewall Inn a National Historic Landmark](#) (the first in LGBT history).

In 2012, Google began observing Pride Month by adding the [rainbow design of the pride flag to its search page](#) in June.

President Donald Trump unofficially acknowledged Pride Month via Twitter in 2019, the first Republican president to do so.

What did the history of Pride look like for Spokane?

LGBT celebrations in Spokane occurred decades before the region’s first official Pride Month. Beginning in the 1960s, “gay balls”—sometimes known as Coronation Balls, [Queen’s Balls](#), or Imperial Balls—were held in Spokane and attended by **drag queens** from across the nation. The [Imperial Sovereign Court of Spokane](#) organized the events, often as fundraisers, and no major violence occurred until a [bomb threat in 1979](#).

Greater Spokane Pride Coalition put on a week of Pride events in June 1986, one of the earliest recorded public occurrences of Pride in Spokane. While the LGBT community has had an organized presence in Spokane dating back at least as far as the 60s, most LGBT residents were **closeted** (not openly sharing their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, often for their own safety) at the time of these events.

Gay and lesbian Whitworth University students made headlines in the Spokane Chronicle in 1970 for discussing sexuality in the HUB on campus. Washington State University held its first [on-campus discussion](#) on homosexuality the same year. Eastern Washington University’s first LGBT group, GALA (Gay and Lesbian Alliance) was [formed in 1984](#). In 1978, Gonzaga’s law school held a [forum on discrimination against homosexuals](#). In 2020, Gonzaga became the first Jesuit university to open a [law clinic focused on LGBT issues](#).

The [first Spokane Pride parade](#) was in 1992, organized by **Spokane’s Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)**. Between 150 and 200 people marched on the sidewalks of downtown Spokane, and the next year, a permit was granted for Riverfront Park. Spokane [Pride Parade and Rainbow Festival](#)’s attendance now numbers in the thousands and is held on the second Saturday in June.

The first Spokane LGBT paper, [Stonewall News Northwest](#), circulated in the years 1992–2009.

In February 1999, the Spokane City Council passed an ordinance prohibiting discrimination in housing and employment based on sexual orientation. In 2005, they voted to extend benefits to the [domestic partners of city employees](#), regardless of sex. Also in 2005, **Inland Northwest Business Alliance** (a [professional organization for LGBT business owners](#)) proposed a “[gay district](#)” in downtown Spokane.



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Fast facts

In 2012, Spokane held its first [Transgender Day of Remembrance](#) in memorial of those murdered or missing. This national day of remembrance on November 20 began in 1999 as a vigil for [Rita Hester](#).

Spokane City Hall flew a rainbow pride flag [for the first time in 2017](#).

In June 2020, a Washington state bill went into effect that abolishes the "[gay panic defense](#)," which is the strategy of claiming temporary insanity because of unwanted same-sex advances.

In 2020, 880 known LGBT citizens [ran for office](#), the largest number to date. There are currently 843 LGBT elected officials in the U.S., nine of whom hold office in Washington state.

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